

Biography

Deborah A. Gist, State Superintendent of Education, District of Columbia

Deborah A. Gist, who taught and served directly in schools for more than a decade early in her career, was appointed State Superintendent of Education in the District of Columbia in June 2007 after serving as the state education officer for three years. As first state superintendent of education in the District, she has been responsible for transitioning all state-level education functions to the newly formed office of the state superintendent of education and for putting into effect the accountability systems of the federal No Child Left Behind education law.

As state superintendent of education, Gist created new, progressive educator-certification policies for teachers and school administrators, allowing school districts and nonprofit organizations to apply to certify educators, and she enacted new standards for teacher-preparation programs to improve quality, expand opportunity, and encourage innovation. Gist worked with first state board of education in the District to transition its role to that of a policy-setting body during the first year of existence, and she developed many important state-level education policies, including standards for health and physical education, world languages, arts education, and early-childhood learning.

Previously, as the state education officer, Gist restored the confidence of Congress in the Tuition Assistance Grants program, resulting in a federal funding increase of more than 100 percent for a program that now serves more than 5,000 college students in the District each year. She also oversaw dramatic improvements in much-maligned child-nutrition programs in the District, including the Summer Food Service program, which was subsequently named the best-performing summer-food program in America for four consecutive years.

Gist began her career in education 21 years ago, as a teacher in the Ft. Worth, Texas, elementary schools, where she focused on literacy education and applied learning. She later taught in Tampa, Florida, where she founded and directed a center on environmental education and later conceived, designed, and initiated Hillsborough Reads, which served families in 108 elementary schools in Hillsborough County. She won “Teacher of the Year” honors at her schools in both Ft. Worth and Tampa.

In addition to spending 10 years serving directly in schools, Gist was a senior policy analyst at the U.S. Department of Education. She advised the secretary and deputy secretary on top issues, analyzed proposed policy initiatives, and conducted research and feasibility studies. Gist also served as the marketing and development director of the Discovery Creek Children’s Museum, in Washington, and she later worked for the Office of the Mayor, in Washington, as the executive director of the office on volunteerism and service programs, Serve DC. A resident of Washington, Gist is a volunteer mentor and a board member for Mentors, Inc.

Gist earned a master's degree in public administration from the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, where she was also selected as a Kennedy Fellow and received the Littauer Fellowship for academic excellence and community service. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in early-childhood education from the University of Oklahoma and a Master of Arts in elementary education, with an emphasis in curriculum, from the University of South Florida. Gist became a certified public manager, following successful completion of a joint program with the District of Columbia government and the George Washington University. In 2008, she completed a fellowship with the Broad Academy for Superintendents, which prepares talented leaders to take on executive leadership roles in urban education.